

DEPARTMENT POLICY

POLICY # 115	SUBJECT: Communications Policy
EFFECTIVE DATE: Sept. 1, 2006	PAGE 1 of 5
AUTHORIZED SIGNATURE:	

I. POLICY OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that communications from and about the Delaware Children's Department are well coordinated, effectively managed and responsive to the diverse information needs of the public.

II. POLICY GUIDELINES

It is the policy of the Delaware Children's Department to:

- A. Provide the public with timely, accurate, clear, objective and complete information about its policies, programs, services and initiatives.** The government has a duty to explain its policies and decisions, and to inform the public of its priorities for the state. Information is necessary for Delawareans – individually or through representative groups - to participate actively and meaningfully in the democratic process. It is required for access to government programs and services. The public has a right to such information.
- B. Ensure that divisions of the Delaware Children's Department are visible, accessible and accountable to the public they serve.** To be accessible and accountable, the Department and its divisions must be visible and recognizable wherever they are present. Clear identification allows the public to see the Department at work, to access its programs and services, and to assess its activities. Communicating through many channels – from service centers, the telephone and mail to print and broadcast media, the Internet and World Wide Web – the Department must identify itself in a distinct, consistent way the public can recognize in all circumstances.
- C. Employ a variety of ways and means to communicate, and provide information in multiple formats to accommodate diverse needs.** Department information must be broadly accessible in accordance with all applicable laws throughout society. The needs of all Delawareans, whose perceptual or physical abilities and language skills are diverse, must be recognized and accommodated. Information must be accessible so citizens, as responsible members of a democratic community, may be aware of, understand, respond to and influence the development and implementation of policies, programs, services and initiatives. Information must be available in multiple formats to ensure equal access. All means of communication – from traditional methods to new technologies – must be used to reach and communicate with Delawareans wherever they

may reside. Modernity requires the capacity to respond effectively over multiple channels in a 24-hour, global communications environment.

- D. Identify and address communication needs and issues routinely in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, programs, services and initiatives.** Communication enables the exchange of information Delawareans and their government relies upon for an effective partnership. Gathering and providing information of importance to the public, government and the democratic process requires professional tools and resources, and effective, accountable management. Internal and external communication requirements must be identified and met when planning, managing or reviewing policies, programs, services or initiatives. Responsible use of public funds to obtain maximum value for taxpayer investments is a fundamental requirement in all communication activities.
- E. Deliver prompt, courteous and responsive service that is sensitive to the needs and concerns of the public and respectful of individual rights.** Information services must be managed in a citizen-centered and client-focused manner that achieves results for Delawareans. Timely and convenient access to Department information and services must be available to the public. Access to information and privacy rights, as well as language rights, must be honored at all times. Delawareans value freedom, openness, security, caring and respect. It is important for the Department to communicate in a spirit that reflects those values.
- F. Encourage Department employees to communicate openly with the public about policies, programs, services and initiatives they are familiar with and for which they have responsibility.** An open and democratic government implies that all employees have a role in communicating with the public while respecting the constitution and laws of Delaware. Department employees must respect privacy rights, matters before the courts, national and state security, Cabinet confidences and responsibility. They serve the public interest best by communicating openly and responsively about policies, programs, services and initiatives they help to administer, while treating sensitive information with the discretion it requires.
- G. Safeguard Delawareans' trust and confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the Public Service of Delaware.** Delawareans value an independent, professional public service that treats individuals with respect, fairness and integrity. The value and reputation of the Department must be honored. Department employees are expected to provide information services in a non-partisan fashion.
- H. Ensure all divisions of the Delaware Children's Department work collaboratively to achieve coherent and effective communications with the public.** As a core activity and shared responsibility touching all aspects of policy and program administration, the communications function involves employees throughout the government working collaboratively. Coordination within, between and among

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divisions is imperative to ensure coherent and consistent communications. Delivering information services in the best interests of Delawareans and their government, meeting internal and external communication needs efficiently and effectively, is a co-operative endeavor.

III. COMMUNICATIONS APPROVAL-POLICY

DSCYF external communications consist of such things as news releases (print, audio or video), brochures, trade show handouts and other information/materials distributed outside of the organization. The Office of the Secretary has designed the external communications process to allow the organization to achieve and maintain a consistent, accurate and informed flow of information. All materials should be consistent with the DSCYF Communications Policy and any Long Range, Short-Term Strategic Plans, Emerging Issues Plans, and Action Plans that will be developed.

All materials must include the Department's name (**Delaware Children's Department** ~ informal; **Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families** ~ formal) and vision (**Think of the Child First**). Variations of these phrases are not permitted.

Prior to publication and/or final development all materials should be reviewed first by Division Directors then by the Department's Community Relations Coordinator. Review by the Community Relations Coordinator has a return time of no more than seven working days.

A. Media Inquiries to DSCYF and Divisions

DSCYF welcomes media inquiries and responds to them in an accurate, thorough and timely manner. As much as possible, media requests for interviews should be fulfilled by *DSCYF* Division Directors.

Contact the Community Relations Coordinator once a media request is made in order to determine who can best fulfill the request. Also, please copy the *DSCYF* Community Relations Coordinator on all media related items to determine if additional communications support is necessary and to maintain a record of each request.

Confidentiality of Clients

Federal and State Laws, as well as Department policy, require that all client information be kept confidential. Therefore, *DSCYF* staff can not confirm nor deny any child is in our care. Questions from media about cases in which the Department *might* be involved with should be forwarded to the Community Relations Coordinator.

EXCEPTION: As stated in the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, public disclosure of the findings or information about a case of child abuse or neglect, which has resulted in a child fatality or near fatality, is permissible. Such disclosure

must be cleared by and is at the discretion of the Division Director and/or Cabinet Secretary.

Reporting Possible Media Exposure

Each division is required to contact the Community Relations Coordinator of any incidences that may be picked up by the media. This includes incidences involving kids currently in our care, incidences in which kids previously not in our care have been taken into state custody, or stories involving a *DSCYF* worker, foster care/adoption parent, contracted service provider or child care provider.

Division staff should notify their Director's office and the Director's Office should notify the Community Relations Coordinator. If it is an emergency situation (i.e. critical incident or child death) the Secretary should be notified by the Division Director immediately.

B. *DSCYF* News Releases

DSCYF issues many different forms of news releases to help keep Delawareans and others aware of the activities and accomplishments of the Department and its Divisions.

Print news releases are the most common. Font size should be Times Roman in 11- or 12- point type. Press releases should not be more than one page long unless **vital** information requires an additional page.

All news releases must contain the *DSCYF* boilerplate language:

On any given day, the Delaware Children's Department provides services to approximately 8,800 children who have been abused, neglected or abandoned, have mental health or substance abuse problems, or have been adjudicated delinquent by the Courts. For more information, please visit <http://www.state.de.us/kids/>.

C. *DSCYF* Photo Policies

DSCYF has two digital cameras available for use by division staff. In order to use one of the cameras, it is important to fill out a request form 5-7 days prior to the needed date. There is also a sign in/sign out sheet that must be completed in order to accurately track usage of the cameras. Once returned, the Community Relations Coordinator will download pictures and send them to you via email or provide them to you on a disk. This allows the Department to archive all photos for possible use in external communication materials.

DSCYF respects the confidentiality of its clients. If you are taking pictures of youth, you must shoot from the neck down or from behind. If it is imperative to take head shots of youth, you must get written permission from parents (consent forms are available) and the Community Relations Coordinator. It's important to remember that

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although parents or children may not object to photo opportunities, it is the responsibility of *DSCYF* to keep the child's best interest in mind.

D. *DSCYF* Video Policies

DSCYF has created a library of programs, shows, interviews and such that have been broadcast. It shall be required that any division or person being filmed for broadcast will acquire or make a video of said broadcast and deliver it to the Community Relations Coordinator for placement in the library.

E. Web Standards

Internet Presence Guidelines

Web sites either fully or partially funded by *DSCYF* are considered external communications and must be consistent with the Communications Standards and approval processes. Every effort should be made to utilize the existing Web sites as a means to publish information on the Internet instead of creating new Web sites and domain names.

The Community Relations Coordinator has the responsibility of ensuring that *DSCYF*' Internet presence is as clear and concentrated as possible and that information is up to date and not duplicated unnecessarily.

All *DSCYF* sites will maintain a common look and feel across all divisions as per DTI/GIC guidelines.

Website Updates/Maintenance

It is important that all the information available to the public online is current and up-to-date. At a minimum, Divisions should review and update any materials online every six months. Of course, updates can be made at any time throughout the year.

To update, remove or add something to the *DSCYF* internet or intranet websites you must first get approval from the Division Director's office. The materials must then be emailed electronically to the Community Relations Coordinator. Once approved, the Community Relations Coordinator will forward the requests to the *DSCYF* webmasters and CC the requestor to notify them that their request has been approved and will be added in no more than five days.